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December 21, 1999

Docket No. 97N-0511

Docket's Management Branch (HFA-305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 106 1
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Dear Sirs;

Pursuant to the CFR publication on November 23, 1999, this organization is filing comments on the application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles to the processing of **fruit** and vegetable juices and juice products proposed by the Agency.

Citrus Grower Associates, Inc. is a non-profit corporation representing only grower entities within the Florida citrus industry.

We are concerned at what appears to us to be an effort by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to require heat treatment of all citrus juices based on data that appears to have been assembled in an effort to prove something, rather than in an effort to find out the facts.

At the recent meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Food, this area was well covered and the Committee's recommendation to FDA appears to speak for itself. It is not surprising that under what were obviously highly abnormal situations, FDA personnel were able to demonstrate that organisms could get into the juice sacks of citrus **fruit**, but there is no data to suggest that this ever occurs under normal circumstances. It appears that the concept of a **5-log** reduction standard can be applied under the HACCP plans and current practices. It may well be that additional routine monitoring on some kind of a spot check basis is justified by one of the State regulatory entities, in order to assure that smaller operators throughout the state are practicing satisfactory sanitation procedures.

FDA errs in lumping the rather acid citrus fruit in the same category with most other fruit and vegetable juices. On the other hand, there are probably more locations serving fresh squeezed and unpasteurized citrus juice than for any other fruit or vegetable. In turn, it is suggestive of the rationale for expanded **surveillance** by State regulatory agencies.

The current **fresh** juice industry is new enough that good industry data concerning their economics have not been accumulated.

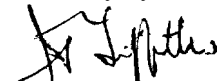
There can be no question that some consumers are more willing to buy fresh squeezed juice and to pay a higher price per serving than would be the case for pasteurized products. This is true, just as the fact is that consumers are willing to pay more for “**Not From Concentrate**” than for reconstituted orange juice. Consumers are inclined to be willing to pay more for that which they perceive as **being** nearest to the raw tit itself, which is the case for fresh squeezed juice. The lack of pasteurization adds additional costs to the individual operator by requirements for improved sanitation and for reduced shelf life or reduced storage possibilities. When one tries to become more specific, data is simply lacking, but the sanitation procedures are simply a matter of doing business and giving those consumers who want **fresh** orange juice the opportunity to have it without heat treatment. That appears to be a viable portion of our **free** enterprise system.

In so far as the Florida citrus grower is concerned, we are interested in regulation which requires and assures that processors and packers offer high quality products in the market place and we would like to see as wide a variety of products as is economically feasible.

Therefore, we want to assure the maintenance of the **fresh** squeezed industry as a desirable and viable, but relatively small, segment of this industry. FDA and USDA need to encourage the application of Best Sanitary Practices, but not require that some specific processing procedure be followed in order to be able to sell a healthful, good tasting product.

We trust that FDA will proceed with implementation of the HACCP principles, possibly with some increased monitoring in terms of checking on product by a State regulatory agency.

Sincerely yours,



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